

## **A Different Kind of Home by kaahiescheck**

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**Summary:** "She's coming with us," Mike repeated, more strongly. 'She doesn't need them. She needs me.' - Picks up exactly where the show cut out from El's face crying in the rain.

## A Different Kind of Home

**This IS the filler you were looking for. I'll admit, not my best work, but I had to get something out there. Hope y'all enjoy it!**

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It was a bit hard to tell, looking at her from behind in the middle of the chaos. Mike followed her gaze to see what had made her stop in her tracks and found Mrs. Byers hugging Will and... That's all. That's all he saw. No one else.

*Oh.*

His brain completely ignored his own feelings, pushing those away for later, and he jumped up from the ambulance. In a few short steps, he was by her side touching her arm. "El?"

She was shaking her head and muttering "No, no, *no*."

El fell easily into his shoulder as soon as he made to draw her closer. While she cried, he looked over to Mrs. Byers, who was only now pulling away from her son. She met his eyes with teary ones for a brief moment before focusing on Will again. It looked like she was giving him the news, because his posture dropped.

Then El faltered in his arms and Mike had to support her. "Hey. Let's... let's go sit down, okay?"

But then the two Byers were making their way over and the older woman got El's attention, making her look up. Her face screamed *no*, *no*, *no*, even as she prepared herself for the worst.

"I'm so sorry, sweetie," Mrs. Byers whispered, pulling the girl into a hug.

The two of them cried, leaning on one another, and Mike could only watch. Will looked at him, just as helpless, and Mike reached out to put a hand on his arm. He couldn't even feel the rain anymore. It was like everything had stopped, even though people were coming and going all around them – military men, firemen, paramedics. He

hadn't even processed the fact that it was over.

When Eleven faltered again, he was quick to come to her side while Will went to his mom, who could barely hold the weight at the moment.

"Hey," Mike said softly. "C'mon, let's get out of the rain and sit down."

She went with him in a trance, still crying. He got them back to the ambulance they were in, sitting down with her and drawing the blanket he'd discarded before over their shoulders. Quickly he realized he would have to lean against the wall next to him, because El completely collapsed on him, shaking.

Little by little, he managed to get them in a comfortable position. He kept one foot on the ambulance's step and got his other leg on the level they were sat at, so she could sit between them and curl up like she wanted to. She put her head down on his chest and grabbed his shirt with both fists while he held the blanket protectively over her, keeping both arms around her.

As time went by, he whispered to her phrases like, "It's okay, it's okay," and "I'm right here," in hopes that he was helping. It did nothing to ease her crying, though.

It was a while later when he saw Nancy racing past their ambulance, and it only caught his attention because she was wearing bright pink. Stretching his neck a bit, he found out it was their mother she was running to – just as much as the older woman was running to her – and they met in a crushing hug.

Not much longer, after a quick exchange of words, both women turned in his direction. As soon as he met his mom's eyes, she was racing toward him. To be honest, he could use a hug from her as well, but he had more important matters at hand (quite literally).

"I'm okay," he said as she stopped next to him.

"Michael!" she still leaned over to partially embrace his head and plant a kiss on top of it. Her hairdo was ruined due to the rain and her makeup was smudged, but she looked more relieved than ever.

"We had just gotten home from the fair and you and Nancy weren't anywhere, and then we got the call that the *mall* was on fire and you two were here – *What* were you doing here? What happened to your face?"

"*Mom*," he said pointedly.

That's when her eyes travelled to the shivering girl in his arms, who was just starting to raise her head. Mrs. Wheeler saw the bandage on her forehead and gasped, "Honey, are you okay? Have the doctors seen you?"

Eleven sniffed and croaked, "Fine."

It was obvious she was *not* fine. Thankfully, Nancy touched their mom's arm to get her attention and muttered, "Hopper."

It took her a few moments to understand, as she looked at her daughter, then her son, then her son's girlfriend, then the fire, then full circle again. In the meantime, El's head slowly fell back into Mike's chest and he stroked her hair.

"Joyce just told us," Nancy added. "She's talking bedroom logistics with Will and Jonathan."

Mike frowned. "What? She's coming with us."

The look on both Nancy's and Mrs. Wheeler's face was so identical that nobody would argue that they were related. And he knew that look too – they weren't sure about his idea yet, but didn't want to hurt his feelings.

"She's coming with us," he repeated, more strongly.

"Mike," his sister started with caution. "You know they talked about it in case... anything happened."

"She doesn't need them. She needs me."

"Mike..."

Then El's sobs got louder and Mike remembered that he was supposed

to be there for her instead of arguing with his sister. He held her tighter and lowered his head to whisper those same phrases again, gently rocking her. When she was slightly less desperate, he looked at his mom, begging.

Mrs. Wheeler watched the scene with a heartbroken expression on her face. She then got closer and bended down to pull the blanket safer across El's shoulders, since it had started to fall. The soft movement caught the girl's attention and she unburied her face from his shirt.

"Where do you wanna go?" Mrs. Wheeler asked, rubbing her arm.

For a moment, Mike panicked that El was going to say she wanted to go with the Byers. He had come *so* close to losing her *again*, so many times the past few days, that he didn't think he'd be able to close his eyes without knowing she was safe and right there.

When she answered, though, it wasn't with words – she simply grabbed onto his shirt tighter and curled up even more. That seemed to be all his mom needed, because she nodded and walked away, presumably to talk to Mrs. Byers.

It took some time, but then they were walking the long way to the car, where his dad was waiting with Holly. Nancy busied herself with helping Mr. Wheeler get Holly's seat into the trunk so she could travel on her sister's lap and make room for everyone. Mike got El inside and clicked her seatbelt for her, and she immediately fell into his shoulder.

The ride consisted of Nancy making up an elaborate story to explain what they were doing in the mall. Mike just threw an arm around El to keep her close and stroked her hair. About halfway home, he felt someone nudging his arm and looked over to find Holly staring at him with big eyes. He took his hand from El to hold his little sister's, using now his other hand to caress El's hair. Nancy then laced her fingers on top of both her siblings' and held on.

"You all need showers," his mom announced when they entered the house. "And food."

The first part they accomplished just fine, El borrowing some of Nancy's clothes. The eating part, though, didn't go so well, as none of them felt particularly hungry after seeing the Mind Flayer and knowing it was made of melted people. And due to all the trauma, of course.

It seemed like forever and no time at all after that when Mrs. Wheeler accepted they weren't up for it. El looked like she would break down again at any minute, so Mike got up to go upstairs with her. But then Holly – who nobody had been able to get to go to sleep – started whimpering like she did when she was about to cry and said his name.

"It's okay," El reassured him when she noticed his hesitation.

But he wasn't going to just leave her, so he said, "You can wait in my room. I'll be right there."

He felt the eyes of the rest of his family on him after she nodded and left, but he chose to walk over and pick Holly up. She latched onto him like she had done with Nancy in the car. He knew she was young, but she wasn't so young that she didn't know something big had happened, even if they had lightened things up around her. So Mike reassured her that they were just going to sleep and that they would be there in the morning.

"Nancy's bed should fit them both just fine," his dad commented.

Mike looked at the girl in his arms. "Yeah, how about that? Would you feel better?"

A smile was just starting to appear on her face when their father spoke again, "I didn't mean Holly."

At that, Mike froze, and he felt his mom and older sister tensing up too. He tried to tell himself to breathe, because they couldn't fight in front of Holly, but his mouth moved on its own, "No."

"I understand the circumstances, but we –"

"No! No, you don't understand! She just lost her father, what do you *think* we're gonna do? She doesn't wanna be with *Nancy*. She clearly

said she wants to stay with me, and I'm not gonna leave her when she's like this, so no. Forget it. *Forget it.*"

It wasn't often that his dad showed much emotion or enthusiasm, so the fact that he turned in his chair to look at him was a big deal. Thankfully, Nancy got up and quickly made her way over, arms already open to catch Holly, who was now whimpering again. "Hey, let's go upstairs. C'mon, I'll even tell you a story."

Mike took the opportunity to climb up the stairs with them, leaving their parents in the kitchen. He planted one last kiss on Holly's head and shared a look with Nancy before slowly opening the room to his room.

At first, he didn't even find El and had a moment of panic that she might have run away. Then he spotted her on the floor next to his bed, hugging her legs, and he flashbaked to those days when he hid her in the basement. She looked just as lost as she had back then.

He closed the door behind him, and El asked in a low voice, "Three inches?"

"What? Screw the three inches," Mike affirmed as he walked over and kneeled in front of her. "Do you need anything? Water?"

She shook her head.

"Okay. Well... you can have the bed, of course, and I'll be right here if you need anything. Or, you know, if you *want*, like, I could – I mean, I'm fine just grabbing a pillow, but if you want me to – What I mean is – I can like, *stay* with you, if you'd like."

She never stopped looking at him while he rambled nervously, and in the end she said, "In the bed?"

This was not the time to be blushing. "Yeah."

"To sleep?"

"If you want to."

El nodded, lips already pursing in a failed attempt to keep the tears

inside. Mike helped her up and let her lie down first, closer to the wall. His bed was a single, so there wasn't much space, and it got crowded when he took his place. But it wasn't an issue, because El drew herself into his embrace and, as soon as she did so, she let go.

There wasn't anything he could say to make things better, as much as he wanted to talk to get some images out of his head. He would never forget the panic he felt when he saw El, bruised and exhausted, held in front of the Mind Flayer like a tribute. All he could think about was their talk in the store and how he'd completely failed at telling her how he felt. He would have never forgiven himself if she'd then died.

But now wasn't the time either. She was overwhelmed with grief, and any declarations would be too much, probably. And, *technically*, they were still on a break. He knew, though, that as long as she didn't tell him to go, he wouldn't.